

01 APR 2002

Mahathir-Terrorism

DR MAHATHIR CALLS FOR GLOBAL DEFINITION, ACTION AGAINST TERRORISM

KUALA LUMPUR, April 1 (Bernama) -- Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad today called on the world community to come to an international agreement on what constitutes terrorism and collectively take action against the perpetrators.

The Prime Minister said the United Nations (UN) was the best body through which the world community could define and act against the terrorism menace.

"While we may be able to agree on what constitute acts of terrorism and who should be condemned as terrorists, it is important that there is international agreement on the condemnation of any particular incident or incidents as acts of terror by terrorists.

"Then the world community can cooperate and participate in whatever actions to be taken against the perpetrators," he said in his keynote address at the opening of the Special Session of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers on Terrorism here.

Dr Mahathir said there was no authority more competent than the UN to make these decisions and once the world body had decided, the whole world must cooperate fully in the fight against the terrorists concerned.

The three-day special session, attended by 52 of the 57 OIC member countries, is being convened as the Muslim world's efforts towards addressing terrorism came to the fore following the deadly Sept 11 attacks in New York and Washington and the deteriorating situation in West Asia.

The meeting is expected to come up with the Kuala Lumpur Declaration outlining, among others, the definition, root causes and measures to stem the scourge.

Dr Mahathir described the Sept 11 tragedy as an "unmitigated disaster" for Muslims all over the world, throwing their image from bad to worse.

"Unless we are able to turn the present worldwide anger over the terrorist attacks of Sept 11 into a real campaign against all terrorists irrespective of their religious faiths, we are going to find that Muslim bashing will be heightened and our struggle to alleviate the sufferings of hundreds of millions of oppressed Muslims will fail," he said.

Following the attacks linked to Saudi-born Osama bin Laden and his Al-Qaeda movement, the image of Muslims has suffered with reports of them being harassed and their places of worship and community centres vandalised.

Dr Mahathir suggested that armed or other forms of attacks against civilians be regarded as acts of terror and the perpetrators as terrorists.

"Whether the attackers are acting on their own or on the orders of their governments, whether they are regulars or irregulars, if the attack is against civilians, then they must be considered as terrorists," he said.

In addition, the prime minister said, groups or governments which support attacks on civilians must be regarded as terrorists, irrespective of the justification of the operations carried out or the nobility of the struggle.

However, Dr Mahathir said, if civilians were accidentally caught in the crossfire, the attackers should not be labeled as terrorists.

According to this definition of terrorism, the Sept 11 attacks, the human bomb attacks by the Palestinians and the Tamil Tigers, the attacks against civilians by Israeli forces, the killings of Bosnian Muslims and others must be considered as acts of terror and the perpetrators must be

condemned as terrorists, he said.

"And anyone supporting them must be considered as terrorists. Where states are behind the acts of terrorism, the whole government must stand condemned," he said.

On the other hand, Dr Mahathir said, no race or religion should be condemned or discriminated against simply because people of the same race of their co-religionists had been involved in terrorist activities.

He said efforts must be made to find ways and means to prevent as much as possible the tendency of certain people or governments to resort to terrorism including by identifying and removing the causes of their bitterness and anger.

"I don't think people would want to blast themselves to death simply because they enjoy doing so. These are acts of the desperate, acts of people who see no way to redress their grievances, to alleviate their sufferings.

"We cannot just dismiss them as senseless perverts who enjoy terrorising people," he said.

Dr Mahathir said worldwide there was a great deal of bitterness and anger among Muslim countries which were subjected to attacks and economic sanctions resulting in many deaths from deprivations of all kinds.

He said the disparities between the rich and the poor as well as the strong and the weak could also lead to acts of terror.

"The world must address these injustices more seriously than just preaching the values of tolerance and understanding while ignoring the adverse results of these virtues," he said.

He said for Muslims, the grievances were real and unbearable and went on to cite the example of the Palestinians who for the past five decades had their lands confiscated and subjected to oppression and humiliation.

"Because they throw stones at the Israelis they are shot at and killed, children included. For the Israelis it is not an eye for an eye; it is a life for being hit by a stone. They believe that by terrorising the terrorists they can stop the carnage," he said.

Dr Mahathir said suicide bombers were not likely to be deterred by the threat of death and killing their leader was not going to help either as more violent leaders would replace the fallen one.

He said, "The Holocaust did not defeat the Jews. A second Holocaust with Arabs for victims will not defeat the Arabs either. Israelis must come to their senses and opt for de-escalation of terror rather than escalating it."

"If the Israelis won't, then the world must forcibly stop them. If we are serious about stopping terrorists, then we must stop both the Palestinians and the Israelis from mutual massacre," he said.

Dr Mahathir said it was important to win the hearts and minds of terrorists and their supporters to discourage them from resorting to terrorism in order to achieve their objectives.

He related Malaysia's experience in dealing with terrorists for 42 years - from 1948 to 1990.

They were found to be mainly Chinese who felt alienated because they had not been given citizenship status by the British, the country's former colonial masters.

He said the independent Malaysian government addressed the root causes of their grievances by, among others, granting them citizenship, land, business opportunities and meaningful participation in the government.

"By removing their grievances and the causes of their violent anger, they had to admit that their struggle had become meaningless. Eventually they laid down their arms. Today, Malaysians of Chinese origin are peace-loving and loyal to the country," he added.

-- BERNAMA
MAM ZS AAM